

135 **Bauer on Office of Aging**
by ANDRE BAUER



I am delighted to help my friend Bill Dukes launch this initiative to focus on some trends and issues of keen interest to South Carolina's mature audiences.

Bill Dukes is indicative of a new movement within our society. Not too

long ago, he capped a successful career with a well-earned retirement. But he, like so many others today, found himself with far too much energy and unquenched desire to settle for the proverbial rocking chair. Instead, he un-retired, created a few more successful businesses, and serves his community on a number of boards and commissions that, among other things, modernized our airport and created our first convention center.

Like I said, he is my friend, and he agreed to serve with other distinguished business and civic leaders on my Commission for Aging Research and Evaluation. He also found time to be a delegate to South Carolina's White House Conference on Aging (helping me raise private funding so it was the first ever not paid for with our taxes) and he joined me as a delegate to the national conference.

Together, we saw first-hand that South Carolina is on the cusp of major changes as the number of its older citizens doubles. This demographic change is due to two factors. One is that South Carolina has its share of 78 million baby boomers that are nearing retirement age across our country. Another is that our state is a wonderful place to live, and we rank fifth in terms of the percentage growth in-migration into our state of affluent mature adults from other sections of the country.

To greet this age wave, which is projected to double the number of people 65 and older from 660,000 to 1.3 million by 2020, our Governor and Legislature transferred the Office on Aging out of one of the largest state agencies into my direct supervision on July 1, 2004. Since that time we've been able to accomplish some great things that our federal Administration acknowledges as putting us in the forefront of our country in preparing for the future of aging.

Working with Bill Dukes and host of others in AARP, the Legislature, and the Silver Haired Legislature, we were able to implement a geriatrician incentive program that is serving as a national model on how to attract specialists to treat older patients. Thanks to leg-

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isolation authored in the House by Rep. Nathan Ballentine, and which passed unanimously, we have awarded incentives to 12 geriatricians in the past year, and every one of them has contracted to stay in our state and treat our citizens for at least five years. Nationally, there is a shortfall of 36,000 geriatricians. The plain fact is, out of 10,000 medical school graduates each year, only about 360 will specialize in geriatrics.

The federal government is now implementing our approach to aging in America by emphasizing individual responsibility and focusing upon home- and community based programs that can improve the quality of life and help mature adults age in their homes. A key element is to empower older people to stay active and healthy through Older Americans Act services and the new prevention benefits under Medicare while ensuring the rights of older people and preventing their abuse, neglect and exploitation. Here in South Carolina we are continuing our emphasis on wellness and prevention. Each year, about \$5 billion is spent by Medicare and Medicaid to purchase medical care for people 65 and older. A very large percent of these dollars goes to treat chronic disease killers such as obesity, hypertension, and diabetes and lung disease.

We believe that our evidence-based prevention and self-management programs, such as Living Well South Carolina, can help persons with chronic disease improve their quality of life and prevent further progression of their disease. We are also creating fall prevention programs that have been shown to reduce the risk of falling. Each year in our state, hospitals treat about 25,000 seniors who have injured themselves severely. That costs more than \$150 million a year – and often these injuries result in nursing home placement.

The US Administration on Aging has announced it will feature, on its webpage, a salute to initiatives that complement its efforts to increase older Americans' options in taking personal responsibility for addressing their long term care needs. It chose South Carolina's Seniors' Cube database project as its first "Program Champion." The Seniors' Cube is a nationally unique data warehouse, created by the Lt. Governor's Office on Aging that can gauge the effectiveness of services for older persons.

We will be using the Senior Cube to measure the effectiveness of our tax-funded programs to further help people understand the fundamental link between personal responsibility, healthy lifestyles and long term health.

We are grateful to Bill Dukes, our Commission for Aging Research and Evaluation, AARP, the Silver Haired Legislature, the Coalition for Successful Aging, the Aging Advisory Council, the Family Caregivers group, the Healthy Aging Coalition, the Joint Policy Committee – and hundreds and hundreds of other South Carolinians for their interest, support and help.